



Immigrant Students in the Trump Era: What We Know and Do Not Know

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Abstract

The 2016 U.S. presidential election marked a time of deep political divide for the nation and resulted in an administrative transition that represented a drastic shift in values and opinions on several matters, including immigration. This article explores the implications of this political transition for immigrants' K-16 educational experiences during President Trump's administration. We revisit literature on school choice and the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)—two policy areas where the most significant changes are expected to occur—as it pertains to immigrant students in the United States. We identify areas where there is limited scholarship, such as the unique educational experiences of various minority immigrant subgroups, the interplay between race and immigration status, and immigrant students in rural areas. Recommendations are made for policy and research.

Keywords

immigrant education, school choice, DACA, Trump, immigrant students

Introduction

Immigration has always been a contentious issue in American politics and education due to divergent views on the rights and legal privileges of

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immigrants and their children. (The term *immigrant* refers to “persons with no U.S. citizenship at birth. This population includes naturalized citizens, lawful permanent residents, refugees and asylees, persons on certain temporary visas, and the unauthorized”; Zong & Batalova, 2016a). However, the recent election of President Donald Trump has sparked an escalating and intense debate over the future of immigrants broadly, and of immigrant students, specifically. Throughout his 2016 presidential campaign, Trump promised to take immediate action to control the flow of immigration by building a wall on the Mexican border, banning Muslim refugees, ending sanctuary cities, deporting millions of undocumented immigrants, and terminating former President Barack Obama’s Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. If he makes good on these promises, the lives of millions of immigrant students and their families will be significantly impacted.

The rhetoric surrounding both his campaign and his administration does not focus on education. In fact, aside from his cabinet nomination for Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, a clear strategy is yet to be unveiled for the U.S. Department of Education. At the time of writing, it is difficult to predict federal education policies in the Trump era. Only speculations can be made based on this administration’s political stance and actions outside of the sphere of education, such as the removal of Spanish language pages and content on civil and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) rights (among other things) from the White House website (Silverstein, 2017). These changes may influence the social and academic experiences of immigrant and minority students. Trump’s ambiguous education strategy and the decentralized nature of the American education system (i.e., significant state control) make it difficult to predict how the Trump administration will impact students of American schools, immigrant or otherwise. Currently, all that is clear about Trump’s stance on education (and that of Betsy DeVos) is his major support for school choice. Yet not much research focuses on the impacts of school choice policies on immigrant students, despite the fact that this population experiences and is affected by such interventions differently (e.g., Haynes, Phillips, & Goldring, 2010). For instance, English-language learners and students who qualify for reduced-price lunch are consistently underrepresented in public charter schools (Buckley & Sattin-Bajaj, 2011). Therefore, it is critical to discuss school choice policies in relation to immigrant students’ educational experiences. Arguably, the expansion of school choice and the discontinuance of programs favoring undocumented immigrant youth, such as DACA, will lead to significant changes in educational equity and access for K-16 immigrant students.

In the midst of vague and incomplete federal education and immigration policies, it is important to review existing literature to inform our understanding

of what has and has not been explored, with regard to immigrant students in the United States. This foundational knowledge is crucial to understanding and foreseeing the extent to which Trump's policies may influence the educational opportunities of immigrant students. Reviewing literature on education and immigration, we explored two research questions:

Research Question 1: What have we learned from existing scholarship about K-16 immigrant students in the United States and the role of school choice (K-12) and DACA (higher education) policies in their educational experiences?

Research Question 2: What are the implications of Trump's stance on these policies for the future of K-16 immigrant students?

This literature review will contribute to our understanding of immigrant students in the Trump era in several ways. First, it will provide an overview of existing literature on immigration and education in relation to anticipated changes to be led by the Trump administration. Second, by addressing the limitations of current literature, the review will offer suggestions for future research. Finally, grounded in scholarly research, we suggest implications for policy makers.

The article proceeds as follows. We first discuss the theoretical framework that informs our analysis of the literature. Following a description of our methods, we highlight literature on (a) the profile of K-16 immigrant students in the United States and the impact of (b) school choice and (c) DACA on the social and academic lives of immigrant students. The article concludes with a discussion of the existing literature and its limitations, as well as the associated policy implications for immigrant education in the Trump era.

Theoretical Framework

Acculturation theories have been among the most popular theoretical frameworks within which to explore the immigrant experience (e.g., Gibson, 1998; Oh, Koeske, & Sales, 2002). Scholars who use these theoretical approaches—most notably sociologists, anthropologists, and research psychologists—have transitioned from a traditional interpretation of assimilation (such as the “melting pot” discourse) to a multidimensional one (Alba & Nee, 1997; Berry, 1974, 1980; Padilla & Perez, 2003). Multidimensional approaches better embrace more of the factors that influence acculturation processes—familial ties, religion, culture, language, power—and the complexity of their interactions (Padilla & Perez, 2003). The key role that educators can play in facilitating immigrants’

acculturation process has also been explored to highlight the special needs of this population (Kurtz-Costes & Pungello, 2000). Performance gaps among immigrants are just as much about sociodemographics as they are about the limited availability of school resources to support them (Koo & Nishimura, 2013; McDonnell & Hill, 1993; Rong & Brown, 2001).

Scholars have called for a more critical and anti-oppressive lens to explore the immigrant experience (Duetsch, 2006; Ngo, 2008). This article also takes this social justice stance to explore immigrant education issues. Such a stance is important not only because the dominant U.S. culture has historically mistreated immigrants and other minorities, but also in light of the Trump administration's anti-immigration executive orders. To take this intercultural hierarchy into account, we turn to Cristina Stephens's (2016) critical contributions to previous acculturation models. Stephens (2016) argues, "[W]estern cultural dominance and the rise of neoliberal imperatives can [also] influence [immigrants'] acculturation strategies" (p. 333). Consequently, she theorizes that acculturation can be "conflict-driven and psychologically stressful" (p. 343). For instance, while assimilation can be *mechanical* (i.e., the immigrant's culture meshes well with the host culture), it can also be *opportunistic* (i.e., the immigrant's culture does not mesh well with the host culture) leaving immigrants to adapt to the host culture superficially without ever truly belonging to either their home or their host cultures (Stephens, 2016, p. 342). Furthermore, immigrants can employ strategies of separation: *Convenient* strategies provide immigrants enough space from the host culture so that they only have to adapt minimally, whereas *competitive* strategies entail aggressively avoiding or challenging the host culture (Stephens, 2016). This critical lens for understanding acculturation highlights the role of the interplay between immigrants' cultures and the host culture.

The application of acculturation theories to explore immigrant experiences has spanned across school and out-of-school contexts (e.g., Fernandez-Kelly & Schauffler, 1994; Ghaffarian, 1998; Oh et al., 2002; Rong & Brown, 2001; Zhou, 1997). Despite absenteeism still being a concern in the United States (especially for immigrants), K-16 enrollment rates are increasing nationwide, maintaining educational institutions as a prominent space in which immigrant children and youth spend their time and an important platform for introducing policies that guide and facilitate their acculturation processes (Gase, DeFosset, Perry, & Kuo, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2016a, 2017b). Schools have been known to be places where immigrant students are relatively protected from hostilities that perhaps they and their parents may face in the broader society (Gibson, 1998; S. J. Schwartz et al., 2014). Emphasizing the role of schools in immigrant students' acculturation process, Margaret A. Gibson (1998) writes,

Although schools have no direct control over the larger societal risk factors facing many of today's immigrant children, they do have influence over the social and instructional environments within the school setting. Students most at risk are those from poor and minority backgrounds who view schooling as an alienating force providing unequal opportunities, who feel their identities and languages are undermined or deprecated at school, and who feel stuck in remedial tracks that offer them little meaningful education. (pp. 629-630)

Consistently, the literature on acculturation patterns of immigrant students has argued that school/educational policies need to build on up-to-date research findings on immigrant students' acculturation experiences (e.g., D'Amato, 1987; Gibson, 1998).

Traditionally, policies in immigrant-receiving countries have leaned toward supporting assimilation, thereby further delineating the power asymmetry between host and immigrant cultures (Fernandez-Kelly & Schauffler, 1994; Grigorenko, 2012). More recently, educational policies are often framed as strategies for more equitable access, despite whether or not this is their core goal or whether or not they successfully deliver it (McDonnell & Hill, 1993). Existing literature on acculturation theories suggests that as an underserved group of the U.S. student population, immigrant students have to reconcile their ability to take advantage of institutional efforts that support underserved groups alongside their domestic counterparts with the policies and practices that alienate them and single them out as non-American.

Given the recent anti-immigrant rhetoric followed by Trump's presidential campaign and election, acculturation theories, once connected to the theory of immigrant reception (Reitz, 2002), enlighten our understanding of immigrants' experiences in a more xenophobic and less welcoming host society. Research on the reception of immigrants has shown that immigrants' experiences are shaped by four dimensions of host society: "1) pre-existing ethnic and race relations, 2) labor markets and related institutions, 3) government policies and programs both for immigration and for broader institutional regulation, and 4) the changing nature of international boundaries, part of the process of globalization" (Reitz, 2002, p. 1005). These dimensions intersect and intertwine in various ways to impact the reception and integration of immigrants (Reitz, 2002). Throughout Trump's presidential campaign and election, immigrants have always been at the center of these dimensions. Immigrants have been argued to contribute to the complex, problematic ethnic and race relations in the United States; they have also been accused of taking jobs from U.S.-born citizens. Arguably, within the broader international context that has created more legal and geographical boundaries to

immigrants and refugees, Trump's opposition to policies and programs favoring immigrants has negatively impacted the reception and integration processes of immigrants, both within and outside of the United States.

Method

Based on our research questions, we searched for relevant works, including peer-reviewed articles, books, book chapters, and educational reports through four major electronic databases: Google Scholar, Educational Resource Information Center (ERIC), Education Full Text, and JSTOR. We used combinations of keywords including "immigrant students," "immigrant student profile," "immigrant education," "school choice," "school choice and immigration," "school choice and immigrants in the United States," "school choice department of education," "school choice mechanisms," "DACA program," "DACA and immigrant students," and "DACA report." We also looked into the articles referenced in the sources collected through the initial search. While browsing through search results and reviewing their abstracts, conclusions, executive summaries, or in some cases, full texts, we applied predetermined inclusive and exclusive criteria to narrow the scope of our research. We included academic accounts for (a) the profile of K-16 immigrant students in the United States and (b) the impacts of school choice and/or DACA on K-16 immigrant students' academic and social experiences. Search results failing to address at least one of these criteria were excluded. Several nonacademic articles were identified to contextualize the literature review within current events. These articles were not included in the analysis. All selected documents were downloaded and imported to a shared folder on Mendeley, a desktop and web program for managing, sharing, and discovering research papers.

With a total of 102 sources, we applied content analysis—"a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 18)—to categorize and analyze the data. Content analysis has been widely used in reviews of literature on educational topics (e.g., Biddle & Azano, 2016; Sadker, Sadker, & Klein, 1991). Mapping on our research questions, this type of analysis allowed us to make inferences about immigrant students from texts and understand these interpretations in the context of Trump's presidential era. Throughout the reading and coding processes, we applied "combinations of inductive, deductive, and abductive analytical techniques" to explore and critically synthesize our data (Hoffman, Wilson, Martinez, & Sailors, 2011, p. 29). We first read a selection of sources as a whole to have a holistic understanding of the texts and to develop initial, general codes on immigration and education. Then, we read sources on categorized topics, including immigrant students in

the United States, school choice, and DACA, to identify codes and make inferences about the impacts of educational policy and politics on immigrant students. Last, we reviewed the literature across different topics, categories, and codes to understand how they may come together to answer our research questions and to draw preliminary findings. Based on Denzin's (1978) and Patton's (1990) categories of triangulation techniques, we compared and contrasted literature from different authors, sources, and publication dates. This approach allowed us to confirm our interpretation of data and strengthen our inferences about the future of K-16 immigrant students from what has been suggested by previous literature.

Throughout the data gathering and analysis process, we held weekly and biweekly meetings to discuss the selection of sources, as well as the interpretation and representation of data. All texts were reviewed, coded, and analyzed both individually and collectively. We constantly exchanged newly formed and revised codes, inferences from texts, readings notes, and highlights of texts to account for interrater reliability.

Immigrant Students in the United States

The number of immigrants or foreign-born residents has been growing significantly over the past three decades (Adelman & Taylor, 2015; Zong & Batalova, 2016a). In 2014, this population stood at over 42.2 million (13.3% of the U.S. population), increasing by 1 million (2.5%) from 2013. Immigrants and their U.S.-born children were estimated at 81 million, proportioning 26% of the U.S. population (Zong & Batalova, 2016a). The majority of this population resides in California, Texas, New York, Florida, Illinois, and New Jersey (Fortuny, Chaudry, & Jargowsky, 2010). In 2014, approximately 28% of 42.4 million foreign-born immigrants were from Mexico, followed by India, China, and the Philippines, accounting for about 5% each (Zong & Batalova, 2016a). Spanish is the most common language spoken at home in the United States after English, followed by Chinese, Tagalog, Vietnamese, French, Korean, Arabic, German, and Russian (Zong & Batalova, 2016b). Immigrants come to the United States for different reasons—including economic betterment, family reunification, and escape from political persecution—with different cultural, religious, and educational backgrounds (Adelman & Taylor, 2015; Chu, 2009; Collet, 2010).

With the increasing number of immigrants in the United States comes an increasing number of immigrant students enrolling in the nation's public school system. Scholars have written extensively about challenges that face immigrant students and schools serving this population (e.g., Adelman & Taylor, 2015; Chu, 2009; Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000; M. M. Suárez-Orozco

& Suárez-Orozco, 2009). For immigrant students, language is a major barrier to academic success. Studies have consistently pointed to the correlation between immigrant students' English language skills and their schooling performance—Students with higher English proficiency tend to receive better grades (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; C. Suárez-Orozco, Rhodes, & Milburn, 2009). In 2013, approximately 25.1 million individuals in the United States (41% of the population) were considered Limited English Proficient (LEP). While the majority of LEP students are foreign-born, nearly 19% (4.7 million) of them were born in the United States, most to immigrant parents (Zong & Batalova, 2016a). Many schools struggle to address the different needs of individual students and minority language subgroups because English language proficiency of immigrant students varies with country of origin and language spoken at home (Chu, 2009). Other institutional issues, such as the historic exclusion of immigrant and LEP students from school accountability systems and the lack of specially trained teachers and school staff to work with immigrant children, pose great challenges for schools in educating this student population (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000).

Immigrant students, especially those who have gone through traumas and hardships during and after their migration to the United States, often experience a great deal of stress in adapting to a new culture (Adelman & Taylor, 2015). Many of them also come from financially disadvantaged homes and are often pressured to take multiple part-time jobs to support their families, which adds more stress and distraction to their social and academic lives (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000). The levels of stress and anxiety are even higher for undocumented immigrant students and students with undocumented immigrant parents, who are often at high risk for deportation. Schools play a crucial role in mediating immigrant students' adjustment process. Studies have consistently shown that a safe, welcoming, and supportive schooling environment can help immigrant students overcome difficulties at school, in the community, and within the family (e.g., Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; C. Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009). These studies suggest that school needs to be a positive place where immigrant students—whether foreign- or U.S.-born, documented or undocumented—feel a strong sense of belonging and encouragement to move forward in the future.

However, funding for public schools to support immigrant students is very limited. There is no federal financial resource specifically legislated for immigrant students, except for a limited amount of federal funding provided through the Emergency Immigrant Education Program (EIEP) that assists schools serving recently immigrated students (A. E. Schwartz & Stiefel, 2004). Immigrant students are also more likely to attend underresourced schools in urban areas, where financial resources for the entire student

population are extremely scarce. Limited funding paralyzes schools and the design and implementation of programs that help late-arriving, underachieving, at-risk immigrant students (Chu, 2009; Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000).

At the state level, most of the attention has been on legislation that provides access to postsecondary education for undocumented immigrant students (Dougherty, Nienhuser, & Vega, 2010; Flores, 2009; Kaushal, 2008; Reich & Barth, 2010). While the U.S. Supreme Court decision in the case *Plyler v. Doe* (1982) ruled in favor of the rights of students, regardless of their immigration status, to attend public primary and secondary schools, it did not address access to postsecondary education for undocumented immigrant students (Flores, 2009; Olivas, 2004). In most states, undocumented students are subject to pay out-of-state tuition while being ineligible for financial aid and work-study opportunities, making postsecondary education unaffordable for many of them (Aboytes, 2009). The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) of 1996, a federal policy that “prohibited states from providing in-state resident tuition (IRT) benefits to undocumented immigrants unless all U.S. citizens and nationals were eligible for the same benefits,” has created more legislative barriers for states expanding access to postsecondary education for undocumented students (Darolia & Potochnick, 2015, p. 509). However, since 2001, 17 states¹ have undertaken legislative action to expand IRT benefits to undocumented students (Darolia & Potochnick, 2015; Serna, Cohen, & Nguyen, 2017). The adoption of IRT policies at the state level has created high legal tensions because it directly counters the IIRIRA federal legislation. As a result, two states rescinded their IRT policies while others continue facing legal challenges to have the policies remain intact (Darolia & Potochnick, 2015).

In a report on immigrant students in U.S. secondary schools, Jorge Ruiz-de-Velasco and Michael Fix (2000) write, “the limited attention and dollars dedicated to immigrant children reflect the continuing mismatch between the nation’s comparatively generous legal immigration policies and its laissez-faire approach to integrating immigrants into U.S. society following their arrival” (p. 1). With the rise of the Trump administration and his escalating actions against immigration, those “generous legal immigration policies” would likely be minimized in the upcoming years, leading to fundamental questions about the fate of immigrant students and their families in the United States. Also, the presidential administration’s strong views against illegal immigration would likely heighten the long-standing tension between federal and state policies toward undocumented immigrants’ access to postsecondary education. As a consequence, state policies like IRT that favor undocumented students would likely be challenged further.

Because Trump's executive orders and proposed changes to immigration and education are relatively new, at the time of writing, there is little scholarly work on this topic (although see Justice & Stanley, 2016). However, based on what we have learned from decades of literature on K-16 immigrant students, they are extremely vulnerable to political and educational changes. The anti-immigration rhetoric of Trump's campaign and early administration have caused stress, anxiety, and tension among immigrant students and their families, especially those considered undocumented (Goodyear, 2016; Stein & Foley, 2016). The rhetoric that targets certain subgroups of immigrants versus others could create segregation and discrimination both *between* immigrant and nonimmigrant groups and *within* the immigration population (Justice & Stanley, 2016). Once reflected into the school environment, this political tension can be detrimental to immigrant students, whose social and academic performance relies heavily on a hospitable, discrimination-free school environment (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; C. Suárez-Orozco, Rhodes, & Milburn, 2009). More research is needed to accurately capture and measure the influences of Trump's rhetoric and policies on K-16 immigrant students' perception of self and others as well as their academic and social performance.

Immigrant Students and School Choice

Of the few indicators that may allow us to partially extrapolate how Trump's administration will impact America's children and students is his support of school choice and voucher programs (Mead, 2016). School choice refers to the provision of alternative means of schooling that parents can select for their children aside from the publicly provided school that students are generally assigned to by their residential locations (Abdulkadiroglu & Sonmez, 2003). School choice provisions include vouchers (i.e., a system providing parents with public funds to send their child(ren) to the school of their choice), charter schools (i.e., public schools managed by groups of people, such as parents, or charter management companies), and magnet schools (i.e., public schools offering specialized instructional programs and curricula), among other options (National Charter School Resource Center [NCSRC], 2017; National Conference of State Legislatures [NCSL], 2017). These options could be limited to the district in which these families reside (intradistrict choice programs) or also include other districts (interdistrict choice programs). School choice is a strategy increasingly implemented in a vast number of U.S. districts today (Carlson, 2014). In 2012, 37% of all U.S. students attending K-12 had school choice available to them (U.S. Department of Education, 2016b). By 2015, 7% of all public schools were charter schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2017a).

While the ability for school choice to improve the academic achievement of low-performing students remains debatable, many arguments in support of school choice are rooted in arguments of market theory, or that competition will create excellence (Greene, 2001). Earlier support for school choice instead ties its importance to the need for individual freedom (Friedman, 1995) and school autonomy (Chub & Moe, 1990); however, this has been misappropriated to further the argument that this will in turn lead to higher academic achievement (Weissberg, 2009). Weissberg (2009) more explicitly argues that school choice and academic achievement are “totally unconnected and may even be antithetical” (p. 324). He further problematizes the assumption that students are not able to acquire excellence on their own and posits that while competition may create excellence, we need to be weary of “excellence in what” (p. 325). In other words, depending on how excellence is measured by states and federal entities, schools may adjust their practices merely to meet those demands, and these may not necessarily be a push toward student intellect.

Nonetheless, more recent support for school choice has still argued that it can help support low-performing students (Holland & Soifer, 2002). Especially in areas with failing public schools, alternative forms of public (or other) education represent an opportunity for underserved families to access more educational options (Harrison, 2005). Vouchers, for instance, are scholarships for the poor to gain access to more expensive educational services (Holland & Soifer, 2002). Similarly, charter schools are often allowed to take over failing traditional public schools to improve their services (NCSRC, 2017). Manno, Finn, and Vanourek (2016) argue that a charter is unique in that

it can be created by almost anyone (e.g., educators, parents, and community groups); it is exempt from most state and local regulations, essentially autonomous and self-governing in its operations; it is attended by youngsters whose families choose it and staffed by educators who are also there by choice; and it risks being closed for not producing satisfactory results. (p. 474)

Other scholars have discussed how school choice better engages parents in their children's education and provides opportunities for increased social capital, and thereby a stronger sense of community (Schneider, Teske, Marschall, & Roch, 1997). As such, support for charter schools, specifically, has been based on the idea that they (a) provide a space for innovation, (b) target and support students in failing schools, and (c) function as “havens” from the bureaucracy of the public sector (Toson, 2011, p. 665).

Yet many continue to speak out *against* school choice. The concern that school choice would lead to sorting and stratification is among the more

prevalent arguments against it (e.g., Haynes, Phillips, & Goldring, 2010; Renzulli & Evans, 2005; Saporito, 2003). While studies *have* shown that school choice can contribute to sorting, there are also potential additional factors like residential segregation patterns that may be contributing to these findings (Urquiola, 2005). Scholars challenging voucher systems have argued that the system does not improve students' achievement (Loeb, Valant, & Kasman, 2011; Rouse & Barrow, 2009). Charters have also similarly been criticized for directing public funds away from traditional public schools yet not being held accountable by the same mechanisms for the use of these funds (DeJarnatt, 2012; Manno et al., 2016). Some school choice mechanisms have also been found to benefit low-achieving students and students from high-poverty neighborhoods to a lesser extent (Lauen, 2009; Ni, 2012). Speaking to this issue, Deven Carlson (2014) writes, "Skeptics of school choice routinely contend that such policies have the potential to 'cream' away the best students, 'crop' away the worst, and thus result in greater levels of stratification along academic, socioeconomic, and racial dimensions" (p. 269).

This has several implications for the context of reception for immigrant students and their acculturation processes. A study that looked at metropolitan Californian districts between 1970 and 2000 found that "districts with larger increases in their low-English Hispanic enrollment shares saw greater relative reductions in the rate of settlement of non-Hispanic children" after accounting for endogeneity of school demographics (Cascio & Lewis, 2012, p. 114). Cascio and Lewis posit that this "native flight" could be a manifestation of a deep-seated "distaste for diversity" (p. 114). Exacerbating school choice options might further stratify immigrant children who are already underserved for other reasons, including language barriers and socioeconomic status (Turney & Kao, 2009). These stratifications complicate the context of reception for immigrant students and thus hinder their acculturation processes.

Similarly, Sikkink and Emerson (2008) explore "White flight" using the 1996 National Household Education Survey from the National Center for Education Statistics, specifically, their data on school choice and the ethnicity of schools. They find that "racial distributions set the context for maintaining school segregation because they provide the basis for evaluating school choice options" (p. 286). While immigrant status and race should not be conflated, this phenomenon illustrates how existing variations in ethnic/racial makeup across schools in part guide parent decisions on school choice, thereby sustaining, if not exacerbating, existing levels of segregation. Because "pre-existing ethnic and race relations" is one of four dimensions of host society that shape the reception and integration of immigrants, ethnic and racial segregation through school choice would have negative long-term

impacts on the context of reception and educational attainment for nonnatives and non-Whites that have a lower propensity for “flight” (Goldsmith, 2009; Murray, 2016; Reitz, 2002, p. 1005).

Tendencies to attend private school also vary across ethnic, racial, and immigrant populations. Specifically, not only are there large disparities in private school attendance between natives (high) and immigrants (low) but there are also disparities between various ethnicities within immigrant groups. While White immigrants have a 17.8% private school attendance rate in 1990, only 4.5% of Hispanic immigrants attended private school (Betts & Fairlie, 2001, p. 46). Using an urban sample of 1990 Census micro data of 5 to 20 year olds, Betts and Fairlie (2001) explore the possible underlying causes of these differences: namely, higher private school attendance among White natives, White immigrants, and Asian natives and lower private school attendance rates among Black/Hispanic natives and immigrants, Asian immigrants, and other natives. The authors find these differences to be explained largely by disparities in household income and even more so by differences in parental education across these groups. They “infer that a voucher program aimed to equalize the opportunity to attend private schools would have to do more than compensate for income differences between socioeconomic groups and would in addition have to compensate for variations in parental education” (p. 49). Ethnic discrepancies do not only exist in enrollment but also in the delivery of educational services within schools. For instance, immigrant students are highly underrepresented in special education and often placed late (Conger, Schwartz, & Stiefel, 2007; Hibel & Jasper, 2012). Their underrepresentation has been argued to be linked to “language, cultural, or institutional barriers to immigrant parents’ ability or willingness to obtain special services for their children” (Conger et al., 2007, p. 426). Because schools have played an important role in shaping immigrant students’ senses of belonging, identity, and hope (Gibson, 1998), their underrepresentation and late placement in certain educational services may hamper their acculturation processes and outlooks on education.

Given the many ways in which school choice can be crafted into policy, it is no surprise that it is a contested issue, as it is never any one thing. Consequently, it is also not an inherently harmful strategy: some studies have shown cases that confirm that it is harmful (e.g., Renzulli & Evans, 2005; Saporito, 2003) while others dispute it (e.g., Abdulkadiroglu & Sonmez, 2003; Harrison, 2005). Ultimately, the impact of school choice policy is dependent on the nature of the policy design and therefore highly contingent on the political process (Carlson, 2014). Many scholars have defined the school choice problem as a mechanism design problem (e.g., Abdulkadiroglu & Sonmez, 2003; Alcalde & Subiza, 2014; Kesten, 2017; Shi, 2015). Existing

literature on school choice suggests that the ambiguous federal stance on education is only made more uncertain by the variety of ways school choice mechanisms can be crafted. Accordingly, the impact of school choice on immigrant students, their acculturation processes, and the broader context of reception has remained contested—It largely depends on the policy design and execution as well as the nature of available choices in school districts that serve large immigrant populations.

Immigrant Students and the DACA Program

During his presidential campaign, Trump heavily critiqued the Deferred Action of Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, leading to much anxiety among its beneficiaries (Foley, 2016). Established in 2012, DACA provides eligible² undocumented youth and young adults, often called “Dreamers”³ or “DACAmended,” with temporary work authorization and amnesty from deportation for 2 years (with potential renewals; Batalova, Hooker, Capps, & Bachmeier, 2014; Gonzales, Terriquez, & Ruszczyk, 2014; Serna et al., 2017). DACA provides the opportunity for these youth and young adults to seek legal employment, pursue higher education, and improve their mobility and incorporation into the United States (Gonzales et al., 2014; Martinez, 2014). According to the Migration Policy Institute, there were approximately 1.2 million undocumented immigrant youth and young adults who are eligible for DACA at the time of its launch in 2012 (Batalova et al., 2014). As of July 20, 2014, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has accepted 844,931 initial DACA applications for processing and granted approval to 741,546 of them (USCIS, 2016).

Studies conducted since DACA was launched in 2012 have consistently shown the positive impacts of the program not only to undocumented immigrant students but also to society at large (Kuczewski & Brubaker, 2014; Martinez, 2014; Sánchez, 2014). For undocumented immigrant students, DACA advantages could mean a brighter future, freedom, and independence (Martinez, 2014). With the 2 years (or more if renewals are granted) of reprieve from deportation, DACA-granted individuals are able to complete 2- or 4-year college degrees and pursue better, more stable careers (Gonzales et al., 2014). With their legal documents, undocumented immigrants can apply for social security numbers, driver licenses, and bank accounts, which correspondingly facilitate their mobility and incorporation into the United States. This opportunity also encourages undocumented immigrant students to stay in school, complete their high school diploma or General Educational Development (GED), and avoid felony convictions and serious misdemeanors. Because “government policies and programs both for immigration and

for broader institutional regulation” is a critical dimension of host society that shapes immigrants’ experiences, the existence of DACA means broader and brighter context of reception for immigrants and thus facilitates their acculturation processes (Reitz, 2002, p. 1005).

For society at large, DACA helps retain the most talented, hardworking undocumented immigrants who are willing to contribute their knowledge and skills to the nation’s wealth. Important fields where minority workers are needed, such as medicine, likely benefit most from DACA (Anaya, del Rosario, & Hayes-Bautista, 2014; Kuczewski & Brubaker, 2014). Discussing the need of aspiring physicians in traditionally underserved communities, Kuczewski and Brubaker (2014) write, “Dreamer students represent a very valuable resource in achieving the diversity necessary to meet the health care needs of contemporary U.S. society” (p. 1595). Scholars believe that programs like DACA most likely ameliorate the shortage of practicing physicians and medical students of minority origins (Anaya et al., 2014; Kuczewski & Brubaker, 2014).

However, DACA is not ideal. While the program widens the opportunity for undocumented immigrant students to attend college, it neither provides financial assistance for low-income undocumented immigrant students nor allows them to apply for federal aid (Gonzales et al., 2014; Martinez, 2014). While several states, including California and Texas, have passed laws allowing undocumented students to pay in-state tuition fees, the rest of the undocumented immigrant population is still required to pay expensive international student fees (Martinez, 2014). Without financial support from the government, postsecondary education is still a far-reaching goal for many of DACA recipients. Another major limitation of DACA is that the program does not provide a pathway to citizenship; therefore, it is not a permanent solution for the legal status of undocumented immigrant youth and young adults in the United States (Gonzales et al., 2014; Sánchez, 2014). While awaiting a more comprehensive law to be passed, such as the federal DREAM Act (i.e., the legislation first proposed in 2001 to give undocumented students the chance to obtain legal status by pursuing a higher education, or by serving in the U.S. armed forces), DACAmented students remain unsure about their futures (Olivas, 2004).

With Trump as president, DACA is at high risk of being discontinued. If DACA is repealed, the window for undocumented immigrant youth to work legally and attend college becomes extremely limited. The entire immigration population will also be significantly impacted. In addition, given Trump’s promise to deport millions of undocumented immigrants, the question remains whether information entered by applicants to DACA can be used against them and their families. In other words, will DACA be used and abused as a “trap” to locate and deport young immigrant students and their families? This will be an open question until Trump’s plan for DACA is revealed.

Discussion

We began our review of literature with an understanding that a critical and anti-oppressive lens is necessary to explore immigrant experiences in a host setting that is neoliberal and culturally hierarchical (Duetsch, 2006; Ngo, 2008; Stephens, 2016). It is no surprise from the range of scholarship dedicated to K-16 immigrant educational experiences in the United States, that acculturation for this population can have significant psychosocial costs. The Trump era is marked with some extreme policy decisions that are admittedly new territory for the U.S. context, thereby rendering existing literature insufficient to predict the implications of Trump's decisions. In the education sector, the picture is even more unclear due to the lack of an agenda from the new administration. Currently, all that is clear about Trump's stance on education is his major support for school choice and opposition to DACA. For this reason, school choice and DACA were used as starting points to explore the questions, (a) What have we learned from existing scholarship about K-16 immigrant students and the role of school choice (K-12) and DACA (higher education) policies on their educational experiences in the United States? and (b) What are the implications of Trump's stance on these policies for the future of K-16 immigrant students? In the following sections, we will discuss what we know and do not know about this topic from previous scholarly research. Based on our review of literature, we will provide suggestions for future research and discuss several policy recommendations.

What We Know

The growing immigrant population in the United States needs closer attention in the years ahead. The heterogeneity of this group with regard to both their reasons for coming to the United States and the resources they bring with them, make it especially difficult to address the educational gaps to which scholars have been calling attention (Adelman & Taylor, 2015; Chu, 2009). Scholars have highlighted the importance of institutional support systems to facilitate immigrants' acculturation experiences; however, schools are seldom equipped to bridge the language and socioeconomic barriers to help immigrants compete on equal footing with their domestic counterparts (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000). The restriction of public resources and funding mechanisms both at the federal and state levels create barriers for local administrators to expand or improve their efforts to support their immigrant students (Chu, 2009; Dougherty et al., 2010; Flores, 2009; Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000). Given these existing concerns around educating immigrant students in the United States, the current administration's anti-immigration rhetoric calls for an even more careful approach to crafting policies around these issues.

While triggered by a market theory approach to schooling, the ability for school choice to improve school quality or student performance is still highly debated, as is whether it has better supported low-performing students (Loeb et al., 2011; Rouse & Barrow, 2009). Much of this is due to the difficulty in forming causal linkages when student performance is equally linked to socio-economic disparities and residential segregation patterns, as well as the varied way in which school choice policies can be crafted (thereby yielding significantly different results). Failing schools and a *false* sense of choice can leave communities once anchored by public institutions, torn and stratified (Renzulli & Evans, 2005; Saporito, 2003). However, previous literature suggests that it is possible for innovative solutions to arise from this administration's push in the school choice direction, which could identify useful mechanisms for children of immigrant families (Abdulkadiroglu & Sonmez, 2003; Harrison, 2005).

DACA, on the contrary, explicitly targeted immigrant youth and has thus far supported hundreds of thousands of immigrants since its launch in 2012 (USCIS, 2016). These recipients have reported experiencing more freedom and independence due to the facilities DACA has afforded them access to, including postsecondary educational institutions (Martinez, 2014). DACA's preference for talented and hardworking undocumented immigrants further benefits U.S. society (Kuczewski & Brubaker, 2014; Martinez, 2014; Sánchez, 2014). Recipients, however, do not receive financial assistance, and while some states have adapted their own policies to alleviate this, the limited resources and the lack of pathways to citizenship significantly restrict what DACA can do to support this population (Gonzales et al., 2014; Martinez, 2014). Furthermore, the question of whether information entered by applicants to DACA can be used against them and their families under this administration creates further concern, but there has been no information provided in this regard.

What We Do Not Know and Suggestions for Future Research

Immigrant populations are often studied as homogeneous groups in much of the educational literature. While authors often explicitly acknowledge this limitation of their approaches, there is a need for big data that are disaggregated across different immigrant subgroups so that researchers will have the tools to explore variations within immigrant populations. Small-scale studies focus on larger immigrant subgroups, and this has the potential of conflating dominant narratives of immigrant experiences with minority immigrant experiences. In the case of the United States, Latina/o immigrants are one of the largest subgroups of immigrants, and literature also focuses on these populations; however, this literature should be consumed with caution by readers

working with other immigrant groups or more diverse combinations of immigrant populations. Further research is needed to equally explore the educational experiences of smaller immigrant subgroups.

Another limitation of existing literature is that it solely focuses on the *needs* of immigrant students while ignoring their *contributions* to nonimmigrant student populations, teachers, and school staff. This limitation demonstrates Stephens's (2016) theory of the role of cultural hierarchies on immigrant experiences, which argues that the cultural dominance of the West creates power asymmetries in the interaction between immigrants' cultures and the host (i.e., U.S.) culture. Research on school integration suggests that racial/ethnic diversity at schools has positive impacts on *all* students (Frankenberg, Lee, & Orfield, 2003). However, this line of research has not been extended to diversity based on countries of origin or legal statuses of students—we do not know if and how the presence of immigrant students contributes to the learning experiences of nonimmigrant students and educators at schools. The proliferation of deficient narratives of immigrants in the United States reflects and recreates the very cultural hierarchy that shapes their acculturation experiences.

More concerning still, definitions of diversity and efforts to attain it are often painted as racial constructions and have little consideration for immigrant status, despite the known benefits of multicultural spaces for learning (Brown, 2006). This is especially so in school choice scholarship which heavily leans toward more racially bound discussions on diversity and discrimination. There is a dearth of studies that discuss the possible unique impact that school choice can have on immigrant students if implemented with the right policy design mechanisms. Understanding this and how this impact may vary across different immigrant populations would help inform creative local solutions in the Trump era.

Discussions of immigrant educational experiences broadly are also frequently set in metropolitan spaces. While this is no surprise given the high concentration of immigrant populations in U.S. urban centers, the experience of immigrants in rural U.S. places is becoming increasingly important after the role that the rural vote played in the 2016 U.S. presidential election outcome (Badger, 2016). Rural areas are also left out of the school choice and immigration discourse. Charter schools and vouchers have dominated much of the discussion on forms of school choice, when homeschooling is often the preference of some rural communities due to their spatial isolation and distance from a regional public school (Levy, 2009).

To address these limitations, future research should pay more attention to the diversity and complexity *within* the immigrant population. Studies need to acknowledge that this population consists of many racial, ethnic, national,

cultural, and linguistic subgroups, which are further divided by socioeconomic backgrounds, regions of origin, and reasons for migrating to the United States. Accordingly, studies using disaggregated data of immigrant subgroups and in-depth methods of inquiry, such as ethnography, should be encouraged to explore the nuanced experiences of immigrant students and their families. In addition, future studies should delve deeper into the contributions of immigrant students to school diversity and the academic experience of *all* students. A more comprehensive approach to this topic would be greatly beneficial for our understanding of immigration and education as a whole.

Policy Recommendations

We urge local policy makers to consider the importance of their role in this highly unpredictable national climate, especially as it pertains to the future of immigrant students. As federal laws under Trump's administration have caused anxiety and uncertainty among immigrant students and families, it may be time to embrace the power of state/local laws. Local policies have the potential to be crafted to address the unique needs and makeup of the subgroups of immigrant students in their state/districts. Administrators at this level must work to provide stability and transparent planning to assuage the anxiety of their immigrant students caused by federal level ambiguity. Policies should be evidence based but they must also be based on *relevant* evidence. Current literature has its limitations in exploring several aspects of the immigrant educational experiences—namely, variations across immigrant subgroups, deficient models of immigrant profiles, conflation of race and immigration in discussions of diversity, and the disregard of rural communities; therefore, local administrators must work to fill in these gaps in ways that are relevant to their specific communities.

Conclusion

Diversity has both academic and social benefits, including higher critical thinking skills, better preparation for employment in a diverse workforce, cross-cultural competency, and “legitimacy in the eyes of the [global] citizenry” (Brown, 2006, p. 348). The role that immigrants play in facilitating this process within American classrooms is highly understated yet remains just as important as the value these classrooms have in their educational careers. Immigrants are just as much contributors to U.S. classrooms as they are beneficiaries of it. Literature to date on DACA and school choice assumes a level of homogeneity of the immigrant populations in the United States and often resorts back to race as the key determinant of diversity. School choice

literature, specifically, fails to sufficiently capture rural areas and home-schooling as they intersect with immigrant educational experiences in the United States. If this nation is to withstand the uprooting of some of its core values at the federal level, local efforts to improve the educational experiences of *all* students (regardless of race, immigration status, gender, and sexual orientation) is a critical first step.

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Notes

1. Seventeen states that allow undocumented students to grant in-state resident tuition (IRT) status as of 2013: Texas, California, Utah, New York, Oklahoma, Illinois, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, Washington, Maryland, Wisconsin, Connecticut, Oregon, Colorado, Minnesota, and New Jersey (Darolia & Potochnick, 2015).
2. Eligibility criteria for DACA: To be accepted, applicants (a) must have arrived in the United States before the age of 16; (b) must be below 31 years old when the program began in July 15, 2012; (c) must be physically present in the United States on June 15, 2012; (d) must have resided in the United States continuously for the past 5 consecutive years; (e) must have no felony convictions, serious misdemeanors, and fewer than three misdemeanors, and do not otherwise pose a threat to public safety or national security; (f) must currently attend school, have a high school diploma or General Equivalency Diploma, or have been honorably discharged from the U.S. military (Batalova, Hooker, Capps, Bachmeier, & Cox, 2013; Raymond-Flesch, Siemons, Pourat, Jacobs, & Brindis, 2014).
3. The term was coined after the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act.

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